



Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-2209

April 21, 2020

Administrator Peter T. Gaynor
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
500 C Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Administrator Gaynor:

We write in an effort to ensure that all Michiganders have sufficient access to water and basic sanitation during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. In light of the high number of cases in our state and the critical importance of water access in mitigating the spread of COVID-19, we respectfully ask that you deem that specific activities to ensure access to water and basic sanitation are “emergency protective measures” and therefore eligible for FEMA assistance.

We are grateful that on March 27, 2020, President Donald J. Trump approved the major disaster declaration for the State of Michigan and ordered federal assistance to supplement State, Tribal, and local recovery efforts in the areas affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes federal funding for “emergency protective measures (Category B)” for all areas affected by COVID-19. We are concerned, however, that FEMA’s current policies do not permit this funding to be used for a protective measure that is sorely needed in the State of Michigan: expanded access to water and basic sanitation.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is to wash one’s hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Therefore, access to safe water and sanitation supplies is essential to maintaining proper hygiene and preventing the spread of COVID-19 to individuals inside and outside Michiganders’ households. The State of Michigan has taken several actions to address the need for better water access to stem the spread of the virus. On March 26, Governor Gretchen Whitmer signed an executive order directing water utilities to reconnect residents that have had their water shut off and approved a \$2 million Water Restart Grant Program to help communities comply with the order and ensure at-risk households have access to clean water for hand washing and sanitation. While these steps were critical, more work is needed. Other barriers to water access, such as poor plumbing conditions in homes with long-term shutoffs and homelessness, cannot be addressed immediately by water reconnection.

Under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S. Code § 5121), the FEMA Administrator has the discretion to determine what activities are eligible for federal assistance during a declared emergency. Given the importance of handwashing, basic sanitation, and household cleaning to mitigating the spread of COVID-19, we respectfully ask that you allow activities intended to expand access to water and sanitation to be considered “emergency protective measures.” These activities include but are not limited to installation of mobile water stations and hand washing facilities; distribution and delivery of emergency bottled water and personal and home sanitation supplies; reconnection of water utility service; and moratoriums on water utility shutoffs. These designations would bolster tremendously Michigan’s efforts to keep our constituents healthy during this unprecedented crisis.

Thank you for your work on behalf of the American people and for your consideration of this request. We look forward to working with you to protect Michiganders’ health and wellbeing.

Sincerely,

ANDY LEVIN
Member of Congress

RASHIDA TLAIB
Member of Congress

BRENDA LAWRENCE
Member of Congress

DEBBIE DINGELL
Member of Congress

ELISSA SLOTKIN
Member of Congress

HALEY M. STEVENS
Member of Congress

DANIEL T. KILDEE
Member of Congress